



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Breaking Open the Word  
Mary Birmingham

## Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time A



Italy, Papal States, Roman Senate. 13-14<sup>th</sup> Century.

Under the heading: "Jesus Christ in Coins." Left: Roman Senator kneeling before Peter; Right: lateral Christogram and facing head of Christ), Christ standing facing, raising hand in benediction and holding Gospels, surrounded by elliptical halo containing nine stars.



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

### Prayer for Generosity

Eternal Word,  
only begotten Son of God,  
Teach me true generosity.  
Teach me to serve you as you deserve.  
To give without counting the cost,  
To fight heedless of wounds,  
To labor without seeking rest,  
To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward  
Save the knowledge that I have done your will.  
Amen.  
St. Ignatius of Loyola

Catholic  
**Faith, Life  
& Creed**  
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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## Liturgical Context

- ▶ Jesus previously used his parables to teach the people, now he uses his confrontation with the religious leaders as teachable moments.
- ▶ Jesus' catechism today continues his theme of kingdom living—what it means to be a disciple in the reign of God.
- ▶ He insists that relationship with God and one another is the heart of his teaching—not rigid legalism or scrupulous adherence to the law.
- ▶ Today's liturgy reminds us of Jesus' primary message: God expects and is due nothing less than our entire being.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

## First reading: Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6

- ▶ Throughout salvation history theology underwent gradual shifts in thought.
- ▶ God entered into a holy covenant with the people of Israel.
- ▶ God delivered Israel out of bondage in Egypt and set them forth in the Promised Land.
- ▶ The people were in awe and surprise that God was so faithful to them throughout their desert sojourn.
- ▶ The customary religious belief of the day was that each territory was presided over by the gods.
- ▶ Each province had its own unique god to which it was subject.
- ▶ Thus, it was logical and tempting for the Israelites to bow down before the Canaanite gods as they entered the new Promised Land.
- ▶ The concept of One, omnipotent, sovereign God and Lord of all creation was not a concept that suddenly emerged. That concept was long and gradual in coming to fruition.
- ▶ Eventually the people came to the awareness that God is One. There are no other gods. God alone was Master and Ruler of the Universe.
- ▶ God is even Lord over the kings of the world, even King Cyrus, the Persian King, in today's reading from Isaiah.
- ▶ Israel remembered Cyrus kindly, bestowing the title "anointed" on him, a title reserved only for Hebrew kings.
- ▶ Once Cyrus conquered Babylon, he allowed the Israelites to return home. The Israelites believed this action to be the result of God's fidelity to the covenant that was forged with the people of Israel.
- ▶ Isaiah affirms the sovereignty God with the assertion that it was God's will that Cyrus be so forthcoming and generous to his people.
- ▶ God is omnipotent and universal.
- ▶ God ruled over both the church and the state. There was no difference between the two.
- ▶ God is the ruler of the entire universe. There is no other God. Period.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about God’s relationship with us?
- ▶ God acted generously on behalf of Israel; in what way has God acted generously on behalf of you?
- ▶ In what way does today’s culture embrace the theology of this reading—or not?

### Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1, 1-5.

- ▶ The backdrop for this reading is Timothy’s report to Paul about his Thessalonians community.
- ▶ Timothy had good things to share about the Thessalonians church, thus the reason for such a positive and affectionate opening to Paul’s letter.
- ▶ Today’s introduction to the reading is in the form of thanksgiving.
- ▶ Paul gives God the glory for the success of his ministry of preaching. Alone Paul can do nothing; only by the grace of God can Paul preach an effective word.
- ▶ Paul thanked, affirmed and encouraged the faith of this young community.
- ▶ Their steadfast faith in God’s power kept them firmly grounded in his love.
- ▶ He reminded this newly formed church of Jesus’ unity and equality with the Father.
- ▶ Paul’s letter is intended to encourage his beloved community in the face of growing persecution. He reminds them to hold fast to their faith no matter what comes.
- ▶ They have already proven that they can be trusted to remain faithful in the face of adversity.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ In what way, if any, is this letter a relevant letter today?
- ▶ What lesson do we have to learn about ourselves and our relationship with God from this reading?
- ▶ Judging from the way you have lived your Christian life up to this point, do you think you would remain faithful in the face of adversity? Explain your answer.

## Gospel: Matthew 22, 15-21

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question. Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What touched you most in this Gospel? What spoke to your life?
- ▶ The Pharisees are angry that Jesus has so publicly embarrassed them in the parables he shared.
- ▶ They anxiously wait to trap him with his own words as soon as the opportunity arises.
- ▶ Jesus' cleverly saw through their conniving and three times turned it right back upon them.
- ▶ The Pharisees join with some of the Herodians (supporters of Herod) to ask Jesus a political question that could have dangerous implications for Jesus.
- ▶ Judas of Galilee revolted against the Romans in six AD as a result of Roman rule, placing God's own land at the service of the pagan Romans.
- ▶ The Pharisees, sure of their own clever machinations, ask Jesus about Roman tax.
- ▶ Is Caesar really entitled to it?
- ▶ Every man, woman, child and slave between the ages of twelve and sixty-five were required to pay a poll tax.
- ▶ It was an excessive tax that amounted to the wage of one day's work.
- ▶ Jesus responded to the question by asking for one of their coins and using it as a teachable moment.
- ▶ He told them to give what is required to Caesar and give to God what is rightfully God's.
- ▶ God is entitled to everything, every thought, every emotion, every feeling: our entire being.



### Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question before going further.

- ▶ What does it mean to you concretely to give your entire being to God?
- ▶ How do you do that in today's hectic world?



- ▶ The culture at the time of Jesus was a shame and honor based culture. Every question was a potential hazard that could compromise the honor of an individual.
- ▶ Jesus cleverly caught them at their own game.
- ▶ The Pharisees used the customary buffer of flattery to begin their repost with him.
- ▶ They tell him he is an honest, law abiding person, someone who teaches God's will and cares little about status, honor, personal opinion and the like.
- ▶ However, Jesus did care about honor as well as the opinion of others. In their eagerness to trap Jesus they exaggerated and stretched the truth.
- ▶ Dripping with more flattery they told Jesus that he could interpret Sacred Scripture.
- ▶ Jesus asked them for a coin on which an image of Caesar was minted along with the word, "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, high priest".
- ▶ Nothing could be more profane than for Caesar to compare himself with God, to call himself divine. Graven images were considered idolatry.
- ▶ Clever Jews found ways to pay the tax, however, without having to touch the coins.
- ▶ It is interesting the note that the Pharisees even had a coin in their possession to produce for Jesus in the first place. Were they not bound by the same law? Shame on their arrogant self-righteousness!
- ▶ Had the Pharisees asked the Herodians to produce the coin to be in accord with the Law, it still would have been scandalous for them to associate with pagans.
- ▶ Without saying a word, Jesus laid bare the Pharisees' own shame before the people.
- ▶ To further take control of the situation Jesus asked them whose head was on the coin. Everyone knew the answer. Jesus just wanted the Pharisees to have to say it aloud.
- ▶ Obviously if Caesar's head is on the coin then it must belong to him; so give it to him; he owns it anyway, insists Jesus.
- ▶ Jesus shames them further by telling them that they already accept Caesar's authority by virtue of the fact that they were able to produce the coin that belonged to Caesar in the first place.
- ▶ Everyone, including the Pharisees as well as Jesus, probably had similar feelings about the tax, but in order to live in peace they simply paid it.
- ▶ The Pharisees' plot to catch Jesus making an errant statement backfired. The people saw their attempt for what it was: merely a trap.
- ▶ The irony of ironies, however, is that Jesus is the one who trapped *them* at *their* own ploy.
- ▶ When Jesus told the Pharisees to give to God what belongs to God it was an indictment. They were obviously not giving to God as they should.
- ▶ What greater shame could there be? They who considered themselves the most observant of all when it came to following the law were being accused of not giving God his just due!
- ▶ Jesus was telling them that to render (pay a debt) to God meant that they must pay their debt to God.

- ▶ Caesar was owed what was his—his face was on the coin, the coin was his.
- ▶ God is similarly owed what is his and since we are made in God's image, we belong to him. Our image is superimposed upon God's image and thus we belong to God.
- ▶ This text is often used in America as a biblical proof text for the separation of church and state.
- ▶ Nothing could have been further from the mindset of ancient Israelites than such a ludicrous concept.
- ▶ Religion and the economy were intimately related and joined together.
- ▶ Another theme Jesus was trying to convey is that those who wish to give to God what is God's must possess a certain detachment from money and material things.
- ▶ The coin symbolized Roman oppression.
- ▶ The Pharisees in question were nationalistic Jews. They formed an allegiance with supporters of the despised oppressor Herod because of Jesus' claims that he would establish a new kingdom that would give the poor a prominent place and role in that kingdom. This was absolutely unacceptable to the Pharisees.
- ▶ They simply had to trap him.
- ▶ Kingdom living requires that citizens of that kingdom let go of obsessive attachment to material things and most especially to money. Such attachment brings with it the temptation to take advantage of others for personal gain.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way is this a relevant word for us today?
- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ Jesus seems to be speaking truth to power. What would happen in our world if we challenged our leaders like Jesus challenges the Pharisees? How do such people usually respond? What is the challenge for us? What does Jesus teach us by what he did in this story?
- ▶ The Christian life is a call to detachment. What are you presently holding on to—from what do you need to detach in your own life?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question. (@ three minutes)

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

### **Concluding prayer**

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97



## Appendix

- Jesus seems to be speaking truth to power. What would happen in our world if we challenged our leaders like Jesus challenges the Pharisees? How do such people usually respond? What is the challenge for us? What does Jesus teach us by what he did in this story?

Someone I knew many years ago challenged religious authorities where she ministered. Her challenge was in the spirit of the Gospel. She lovingly, yet assertively challenged those in power over several justice related issues. She was right. However, Jesus told us to expect suffering and persecution when we stand up for what is right and for the Good News of Jesus Christ. She was subsequently fired.

I always felt badly that I never spoke on her behalf. She did what should have been done; but those in power over her resented the implications that they were not following through with what the Gospel demands.

In giving myself completely to God as today's Gospel implies I must be willing to stand up for what I believe as Paul insists in today's second reading, no matter the cost. I am always afraid that I will be too timid to do the right thing. Thankfully I have not been faced with many such situations in my life. As it is stated in the New Testament, faithful Christians must believe that God's grace and strength will be given to us when and if we are dragged before courts to testify to truth.

The challenge for me is to be diligent when it comes to my life of faith. Only then will I be prepared with the grace of God to speak truth to power or for that matter, speak truth to anyone who will listen. Such is the call and mandate of my baptism.



# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Morality  
Moral Decision Making  
Stewardship  
Ecumenism  
Faith

Prayer  
Mary Model for the Church  
Eschatology  
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## MORALITY

The gospels continue to stress what it means to live according to gospel values in the kingdom of God. It comes down to a matter of heart--not law. When the law is examined from the perspective of "how one can find the necessary loopholes to circumvent it", then the law serves no purpose. The gospel demands that what is important is the person's heart. Jesus insisted that we are to be faithful and give our entire beings over to God because we are his own creation. With that as a theology that underpins the way we live the Christian life it is appropriate that we focus on what it means to live the moral life in the first place. Thus we address what the Church teaches about MORALITY.

## MORAL DECISION MAKING

The gospels continue to stress what it means to live according to gospel values in the kingdom of God. It comes down to a matter of heart--not law. When the law is examined from the perspective of "how one can find the necessary loopholes to circumvent it", then the law serves no purpose. The gospel demands that what is important is the person's heart. Jesus insisted that we are to be faithful and give our entire beings over to God because we are his own creation. With that as a theology that underpins the way we live the Christian life it is appropriate that we focus on how we make decisions to live the moral life in the first place. Thus we address what the Church teaches about MORAL DECISION MAKING.

## STEWARDSHIP

The Pharisee asked Jesus about the Roman tax. Is Caesar entitled to it? The amount of the tax was the same as a day's wage. Jesus told them to give to Caesar what is rightfully Caesar's and to God what is rightfully God's. Everything belongs to God since God is author of all creation. Yet God is not stingy and invites us to use the resources he has given us. It is our responsibility to use them wisely—to be good stewards of what God

has given us. It is thus fitting that today we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about STEWARDSHIP.

## **ECUMENISM**

In today's first reading Cyrus was a king that conquered Israel. Israelites called him anointed—a title reserved only for Israelite kings. Cyrus was a pagan but after he accomplished the takeover of Israel's throne and took control of Babylon, he let the Jews return home to practice their faith. He was looked upon in a good light by Israel. Isaiah believed this was God's way of being faithful to his covenant with the people of Israel, demonstrating the universality of God. God is sovereign, and ruler of all the nations of the earth. God is the supreme one and only ruler of the nations. God, therefore expects us to reach out in love to people of other faiths and give them due respect. It is in that light that we focus our attention today on ECUMENISM.

## **FAITH**

Paul affirms the Thessalonians community for their steadfast faith. It is a faith to which we are all called. Jesus has been giving us a catechism on what it means to have committed faith in the kingdom of God for the past weeks. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches us about FAITH.

## **PRAYER**

Paul affirms the Thessalonians community for their steadfast faith. It is a faith born of love and tested by persecution on the fledgling church. Jesus has been giving us a catechism on what it means to have committed faith in the kingdom of God for the past weeks. Such faith is not possible to sustain without nurturing the relationship with God in Christ through consistent prayer. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches us about PRAYER.

## **MARY MODEL FOR THE CHURCH**

October is the month we remember and honor the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and model disciple. It is thus appropriate we focus our attention this month and in today's session on MARY, MODEL DISCIPLE.

## **ESCHATOLOGY: HEAVEN, HELL and PURGATORY**

Since the liturgical year is slowly winding down and coming to the end the focus will turn to last things and end times and the afterlife. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on ESCHATOLOGY: HEAVEN, HELL and PURGATORY.

## **EUCCHARIST SERIES:**

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part \_\_\_\_ of the Eucharistic Series.